

# METRO PICTURES

Carel, Sari. "René Daniels: Metro Pictures," *zingmagazine* (Fall 2000): 13.

## RENÉ DANIËLS: METRO PICTURES • NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Upon entering René Daniëls' show at Metro Pictures Gallery, I immediately felt akin to the general attitude mounted on the walls. I was quite pleased to find myself in this situation, in Chelsea of all places, on a Friday afternoon.

Taking the trusty path of wit, lack of hierarchy and a thin layer of skepticism regarding the painting itself as it is painted, is what leads Daniëls to almost all the pieces in the show. In one painting you discover a skateboard with eternal swooshing powers gliding across the seas. In two others, a few giant mussels are swirling in a landscape and a scooter-man plows the country side that fills up the entire painting. All these vessels have a strange and humorous relationship to the space they inhabit and are painted with an economical almost formulaic style of representation, reductive in means, yet lacking any gloss or sexiness that might follow. On the contrary, they are slightly awkward, because of an evident irreverence for beauty which I automatically take a shine to.

Daniëls' fascination with visual puns is not unlike Marcel Broodthaers' in character. Broodthaers, a Belgian poet and later also a visual artist and filmmaker is affiliated with Surrealism but was basically a one man phenomenon. These visual puns are accompanied by an approach that exposes the complete dependence of the meaning of a sign upon the mechanisms of contingency, context, and composition. The sign itself is almost an opaque form or a shell, its meaning doesn't really amount to much if it isn't placed anywhere. In a group of paintings and drawings, a basic and slightly baffling description of a gallery space in perspective with paintings on the wall (empty rectangles will suffice) turns into an awfully big bow-tie with square patterns in the next one. In another group, an image of tree branches becomes a representation of window bars that give the composition of a landscape its umph, and a little later serves as a basis for a graph of information. These, I suspect, are also casual parodies of the idea of the visual motif as having intrinsic artistic value and as an emblem of artistic development and inspiration.

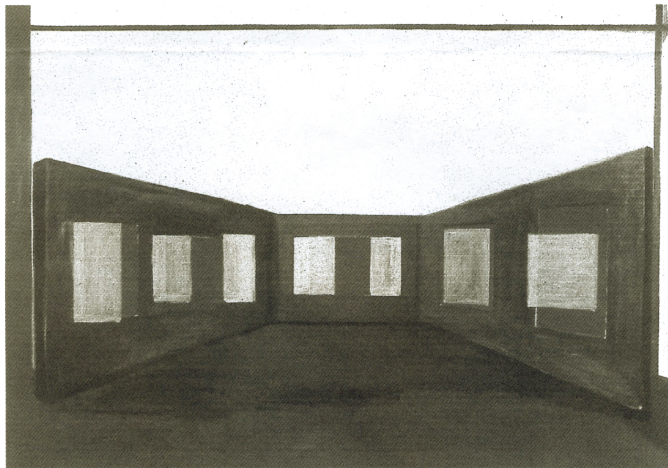
The affinity with Broodthaers comes up in the poetic consistency of the paintings as well. A tad Surreal with a slightly peculiar taste for the marginal and the unimportant. If Daniëls' paintings were words (and they kind of seem like they could be) they would probably be second half of the twentieth century-Western hemisphere—with a dash of irony—versions of the traditional Hai Ku.

René Daniëls suffered from a severe brain aneurism at the age of 37 and hasn't made much work since. This body of work was completed by 1987 but is surprisingly very much in tune with today's sensibilities and inclinations. Its strong appeal makes a viewer wish they could see what his paintings would look like today.

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Marcel Broodthaers, *CASSEROLE AND CLOSED MUSSELS* 1964-5  
mussel shells, polyester resin and iron casserole, Tate Modern  
Gallery



René Daniëls, *PAINTING ON THE BULLFIGHT*, 1985  
oil on canvas